

# The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

The Thoreau Society, Inc., is an informal gathering of students and followers of Henry David Thoreau. Mr. G. Russell Ready, Berwick, Ont., president; Mr. Robert Needham, Concord, Mass., vice-president; and Walter Harding, State University, Geneseo, N.Y. 14454, secretary-treasurer. Annual membership, \$2.00; life membership, \$25.00. Address communications to the secretary.

BULLETIN NINETY-SEVEN

FALL, 1966

A NEW EDITION OF THOREAU . . . . WH

THOREAU IN HONG KONG by Joseph Jones

It is with great joy we announce that under the joint sponsorship of the Modern Language Association (the major professional association of college teachers of English and other modern languages) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (which was established by Congress last spring and which Barnaby Keeney heads), work has been started on a new comprehensive edition of the writings of Henry David Thoreau.

The new edition, which will probably run to twenty or twenty-five volumes, will contain all of Thoreau's published works, including the complete journals, plus such unpublished works as his college essays and the "Notes on Fruits and Seeds." Each of the works will be edited according to the most advanced bibliographical principles and will be based, where possible, on Thoreau's manuscripts or the best possible "copy text." It should mean that we at last will have a truly standard edition of Thoreau's writings.

Walter Harding is to be editor-in-chief of the new edition; Professors Carl Bode of the University of Maryland, William Gibson of New York University (and director of the Modern Language Association's Center for Editions of American Authors), Alexander Kern of Iowa State University, and Lyndon Shanley of Northwestern University are members of the executive committee; and editors of the individual volumes are to be Bode (Correspondence, Poems), John Broderick of the Library of Congress (Journal), Wendell Glick of the University of Minnesota at Duluth (Reform Papers, Journal), Harding (Correspondence), Carl Hovde of Columbia University (Week, Journal), Kern (Excursions, Notes on Fruits and Seeds, Journal), Joseph Moldenhauer of the University of Texas (Maine Woods, Journal), Edwin Moser of the University of Massachusetts (College and other early essays), Ethel Seybold of Illinois College (Translations), Shanley (Walden, Journal), Leo Stoller of Wayne State University (Notes on Fruits and Seeds, Journal), J. Golden Taylor of Colorado State University (Journal), Paul O. Williams of Principia College (Journal, Index), and Lawrence Willson of the University of California at Santa Barbara (Cape Cod, Journal).

Editing of the new edition is expected to take five years, but it is hoped that individual volumes will begin to appear within two years. Editorial work is being underwritten by a federal grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Negotiations for publication of the edition are now under way and it is hoped that the name of the publisher can be announced within a few months.

Professor Halperin's account of his experiences teaching Thoreau in Israel (TSB #94 Winter 1966) is the kind of thing we teachers should write more often. We don't very regularly talk this kind of shop, which nonetheless might prove ultimately more useful than some we do talk. I can't quite duplicate the Israeli report from the other side of the world, but for the record will set down the fact that for the first time, so far as I am aware, I "did" WALDEN with Chinese students at the University of Hong Kong, along with shorter selections (in a survey course) at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (United College branch). I was a little surprised at the general lack of knowledge as regards Thoreau and Transcendentalism (Emerson included), in view of the lively interest so consistently reported from Japan.

The WALDEN was part of a series of lectures commonly assigned to the Fulbright lecturer, beginning with THE SCARLET LETTER and continuing through LEAVES OF GRASS, HUCKLEBERRY FINN, THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY, and concluding, for the moderns, with Pound, Eliot, and Faulkner (GO DOWN, MOSES). In order to work it in, I had to jettison for the time being MOBY DICK, doing so in answer to some objection that the staff had voiced over the inordinate length of Melville, but also on the plea that Transcendentalism as one of the major movements in American literature had no representative.

Chinese students are in large part the antithesis to the Israelis of Professor Halperin's experience: they expect to be lectured at, take voluminous notes, volunteer little or nothing, and retire into seclusion to study furiously ("revise," they call it) for some weeks before examinations. They impressed me as over-competitive but under-curious. It was difficult to persuade them to talk, especially in the larger lecture sections; and I seemed to sense a late-Confucian brand of exaggerated respect for the institution of professorship that I found less flattering than frustrating. Occasionally in "tutorials" or in small "reading classes" it was possible to generate a little steam, but even there I found myself nagging them to unburden themselves. (My predecessor had most obligingly warned me of all this, and in conversation with other staff members I was told that the patterns of primary and secondary education in the colony could be held largely responsible, and I can believe it.) They were mildly astonished and at least somewhat interested to hear that WALDEN had Oriental associations; and of course I plucked this particular string for all I could make it render.



A few of them had some notion that certain Chinese writers might furnish parallels, but again it was not easy to explore this lead. Their written work, I found, was the principal avenue to their ideas.

Since there were numerous options on the final examination, not all students opted American literature and of these, not many had much to say about Thoreau apart from what might have been gleaned from an outline. One observed that "Liberty is emphasized in Whitman and Thoreau," and another, who did not like Emerson's "reckless style," said of Thoreau: "His spirit of experimentation is great. His civil-disobedience makes him like an Asian. His crystal and smooth style is what I like most." The best answers to the American questions, for the most part, were those relating to Hawthorne and James, whose heroines (Hester Prynne and Isabel Archer) formed a natural pair for critical analysis. In an earlier essay assignment, to compare Thoreau with one or more later Americans, one student selected E. A. Robinson, finding similarities between "Civil Disobedience" and Robinson's opposition to dollar-diplomacy ("Cassandra") and seeing Robinson, with pessimistic modifications, as a continuation of transcendentalist idealism. Another bracketed Emily Dickinson with Ernest Hemingway (!) on the grounds of social nonconformity as one common factor and lack of religious orthodoxy another. Although "both Dickinson's and Thoreau's spheres of nature were small in comparison with that of Hemingway," the writer (saying, over-modestly, "this may be a trivial point") concluded that "the environment and the sphere of movement can not kindle a genius. A genius can produce great work under any circumstance." (This "trivial point" is one that aspiring writers in Hong Kong might well take to heart.) A third, in choosing Frost as his later writer, spoke of Thoreau's "wary, stubborn and insistent pride in his argument." The common element of nature-interest, naturally, was emphasized in this last treatment. All these writers showed quite a good understanding of the primary ideas they undertook to discuss (especially after only brief acquaintance) but they came to grief more often than not in assessing style and diction; their experience with English, understandably, had not been sufficient for them to use with much accuracy such terms as "colloquial" or "vernacular."

Whether or not I really succeeded with WALDEN, then, I'm still not sure, but I did encounter -- belatedly enough, at the end of the second term -- an ally in the person of a modern Chinese sage, Dr. Lin Yutang. Late in March, Dr. Lin delivered to a capacity audience in Loke Yew Hall at the University of Hong Kong a lecture on differences, as he saw them, between Chinese and Western philosophy. Thoreauvians will recall that in the 1930s this most amiable and witty man -- now a very green 71 -- had some eloquent words to say for Thoreau in THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING. I went to his lecture eagerly but not altogether hopefully, wondering if perchance he might drop a pearl or two that I could toss back at my students. And he did -- not for Thoreau (that would have been entirely too pat) but for Emerson. Developing some strictures against Western over-reliance on formal logic, Dr. Lin paid high tribute to Emerson's oracular style and method, remarking that many of his epigrammatic sayings had the beauty of carefully cut and polished gem-stones, and briefly speaking up for intuitive thought. I was ready to murmur, by then, "Lord, lettest now thy servant depart in peace," and on leaving the auditorium I

kept as sharp a lookout as I could for a student at whom I could point a finger and say, "Now will you believe what I told you about Emerson?" but none was in sight.

It is interesting to speculate on what Thoreau might have thought of Hong Kong. As the principal port-city of the Far East, and a mecca for bargain-hunting tourists, it is shamelessly, and some would say soullessly, commercial. Its proliferating industries, based upon a plentiful supply of comparatively inexpensive labor, render it in many respects a sort of 20th-century "great workhouse of the world" as Thoreau regarded England in his day. Distances between rich Chinese and poor Chinese are very wide indeed. Business goes on all day and part of the night all seven days in the week, especially in the smaller shops. Hong Kong's hallmarks are incessant noise, interminable movement, and in places an incredible clotting-up of human beings -- certainly no Thoreauvian ideal. Yet there are many areas of Hong Kong Island itself and the New Territories which remain sylvan and rural. The flora, particularly, are a joy to encounter. The Chinese people are an endless source of interest as well as of muted wonder at the "quiet desperation" which produces surprisingly little violence and crime (the Kowloon riots of Easter week, 1966, were the first in ten years), for desperation must be the portion of uncounted thousands. There are enough suicides to warrant a special society for their prevention. Is not all this material for another blistering chapter on "Economy"?

I have never felt that Thoreau would be one to damn unequivocally everything he would find in this century, were he to be transmigrated among us. He might even be able to arrive at some sort of working truce with Hong Kong as he did with Concord, though admittedly it would be difficult. The home-handicraft arrangement by which (in part) he made his living still exists here. There are Walden Ponds. Nature is studied here, no part of it more intensively than the world of fishes, which always fascinated him. He would find his hunters (fish-hunters), farmers, and woodcutters to talk to. He might find, even, his Alcotts and Emersons, who we should not forget were at least as much a minority then as they are today. Most of the Walden huts -- there are thousands of them in the colony, costing very little more money and labor than the original -- are too closely crammed together, but now and then one finds a solitary, or nearly solitary, squatter in the woods on one of the mountainsides. There would be no bar to his borrowing books at the public library in City Hall, the American Cultural Center, or one of several other sources. His taste for music could be readily gratified. I rather imagine, in fact, that the easy-working poor man's compromise with the hard-working rich man's elegant society might pose even fewer difficulties than it did in 1845. All in all, Hong Kong is a most fruitful cornucopia of illustration for anyone who knows and loves his WALDEN.

I will finish this ramble with one brief reminiscence. Living as I did about an hour's walk from the University, I discovered early in my sojourn that I could make the journey along the cap of a covered waterworks conduit, leading from a reservoir a few minutes beyond my apartment on down to some settling-basins just above the campus -- recalling, in a sense, the railroad grade between Walden and Concord. It took me mostly



through light woodland, along the slopes of a mountain called High West. At one place it was my custom to pause and sit down on a concrete valve-housing to view the panorama of Hong Kong harbor, with Kowloon, the New Territories, and much else in the distance: a magnificent sight by any standard. One day in April I eased myself gently down upon this somewhat awkward bench, only to come back up with considerably accelerated energy. Something had "nipped me in a vital part" and when I looked to discover the source of the indignity, it was a very large black Hong Kong ant, frantically scampering off in search of other business. An Imperialist, no doubt. The Red Republicans, I reminded myself, could not be far away. University of Texas

RUSS READY . . . by Robert Needham

Highlighting the international scope of the Thoreau Society the members at their 25th anniversary meeting elected a Canadian citizen as their 13th president.

George Russell Ready was born September 25, 1918 in Berwick, Province of Ontario, some 40 miles from Ottawa. His mother was of French ancestry; his father a descendant of the celebrated Raby family in Hungary.

During his first twenty years "Russ" knew the toil and problems of life in a rural farming community. Leaving high school he became a technologist in the employ of the Bell Telephone Company, and continued his education with two years of night courses at Carleton University.

His work with the telephone company gave him a broad experience in the field of communications. An adventurous assignment in Goose Bay, Labrador, interrupted studies at Middlebury College where he was working for an M.A. under Dr. Kubeta. The years 1942-46 in World War II found him in the Royal Canadian Signals; he reached the rank of captain in a unit doing electrical communication design. This gave him a taste of the rigors of existence in Baffin Land.

President Ready's interest in Henry David Thoreau was kindled by the reading of "Walden" in 1939. Here he learned about a kindred soul in a man who responded to the urge of "doing what he wanted to do".

It was this kind of urge that prompted "Russ" on retirement from the Bell Telephone Company after 27 years service to enter the field of teaching. His preparation was earning the degree of B.A. at Sir George William University in Montreal with the class of '57.

That year 1957 marked his first visit to Concord. Significantly, while in attendance at his first Thoreau Society meeting, he was taken to the site of Thoreau's Walden house by Roland Wells Robbins. Henceforth, Thoreau's life and writings became a pervasive influence that brought Mr. Ready every year to the annual meeting of the Society, always accompanied by his close companion D. W. Pettinger.

Finally, doing what he had long wanted, he began last year a new and exhilarating chapter in his life as a teacher of English at Eastern Institute of Technology at Ottawa. Unmarried, he lives on the family estate at Berwick with the family of his married brother, Bertram, that includes four children.

As the first foreigner to be elected head of the Thoreau Society our new president senses the

worldwide influence of H.D.T. whose thoughts on civil disobedience have been fruitfully applied by Ghandi in India, and by Dr. Martin Luther King in helping the American Negro break the shackles of second-class citizenship.

#### ADDITIONS TO THE THOREAU BIBLIOGRAPHY . . .WH

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Anderson, Oma Carlyle. "Henry David Thoreau." EDUCATIONAL FORUM, XXX (Nov. 1965), 78. A poem.

Berkow, Ira. "Will Thoreau's Walden Pond Become 'Walden Puddle?'" MINNEAPOLIS TRIBUNE. Oct. 2, 1966. On the low water level of the pond.

Gale, Robert. EMERSON AND TRANSCENDENTALISM. Woodbury, N.Y., 1966. 205pp. 95¢. A "guide" to Transcendentalism with many references to Thoreau.

Green, David Mason. THE FRAIL DURATION: A KEY TO SYMBOLIC STRUCTURE IN WALDEN. San Diego State College Humanities Monographs, Vol. I, No. 2, 1966, 52pp. \$1.95. (On sale at Aztec Shops, San Diego State College). A close examination of the "symbolic structure of "Economy," "Where I Lived," and "Reading" as a clue to the understanding of WALDEN as a whole. His conclusions --for example, that "Economy is primarily a negative "preface" to WALDEN, to which the remainder of the book is a positive reply-- usually are to the point. But his "evidence" often does more to hurt than help his theses because he persists in reading "symbolic" intent into Thoreau's every word, where there is often serious question as to whether Thoreau had any such intent. (For example, that Thoreau was consciously emphasizing fire, air, earth and water symbols.) Perhaps he himself is conscious of this weakness of the book, for he protests too much with such phrases as "It would perhaps be rash to assume. . . "or "Perhaps this is a way of saying. . . "

Harding, Walter. THE DAYS OF HENRY THOREAU. Reviews: ATLANTA [Ga.] JOURNAL, Nov. 21, 1965; CHRISTIAN CENTURY, March 9, 1966; DETROIT BOOKS NEWS, Dec. 5, 1965; SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER CHRONICLE, June 12, 1966; OMAHA WORLD HERALD, Dec. 5, 1966; LONG BEACH [Cal.] PRESS TELEGRAM, Dec. 28, 1965; PORTLAND [Me.] TELEGRAM, Nov. 28, 1965; SPRINGFIELD [Mass.] REPUBLICAN, Dec. 19, 1965; AUDUBON MAGAZINE, Sept. 1966; HARTFORD COURANT, Sept. 25, 1966.

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Hovey, Allen Beecher. THE HIDDEN THOREAU. Beirut [Lebanon]: Catholic Press, 1966. 152pp. [Shortly to be made available in America.] An intensive study of Thoreau's earlier writings up through WALDEN, emphasizing in particular their mythological basis and structure. Some of the suggestions (such as that the intersecting lines on Thoreau's map of Walden Pond were intended to symbolize a Christian cross) are fantastic. But they are more than outweighed by some interesting insights into what Thoreau was driving at.

Neufeldt, Leonard Nick. THE WILD APPLE TREE: POSSIBILITIES OF THE SELF IN THOREAU. Urbana, Ill. University of Ill. Unpublished Ph.D. disserta-



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 Thoreau, Henry David. "Civil Disobedience" in Staughton Lynd, ed. NONVIOLENCE IN AMERICA: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966, pp. 57-82. \$3.45. Volume also contains many other references to Thoreau's essay and influence.  
 ----- RESISTANCE TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT. Kyoto, Japan Abollon-sha, 1966. 54pp. Introduction by M. Higashiyama. "Privately printed for Leonard Kleinfeld. Edition limited to 300 copies."  
 ----- WALDEN in Gordon & Feidelson, eds. THE INDIVIDUAL AMERICAN. Boston: Ginn, 1966. pp. 376-629. A complete well-annotated text for use in high schools.  
 Very, Lydia L.A. "The Thoreau Field Club." in POEMS AND PROSE WRITINGS. Salem, Mass.: Salem Press, 1890. pp. 362-7. An amusing account, by Jones Very's sister, of an early nature club named after HDT.

We are indebted to the following for information used in this bulletin: R.Adams,H.Adel,T.Bailey,M. Campbell,K.Cameron,E.Denis,R.Epler,H.Gottschalk,B. Gronewald,P.Hebert,G.Hendrick,E.Hunsaker,R.Jones,D. Kamen-Kaye,J.Moldenhauer,V.Munoz,R.Needham,W.Peter-son,L.Rathbun,R.Schaedle,E.Schmidt,R.Story,H.Uhlig, H.VanFleet,P.Walker,S.Wellman, & H.Zeitlin. Please keep the secretary informed of Thoreau items as they appear.

The following have recently become life members of the Thoreau Society: Mr. Rupin Desai, Evanston, Ill.; Miss Eleanor Wells, Framingham, Mass.; Mr. Paul K. Brown, Lexington, Mass.; Mr. William H. Baker, Covington, Ky.; and Mr. Paul Oehser, Washington, D.C. Life membership is twenty-five dollars.

#### A THOREAU PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST . . .

At the suggestion of Mr. Robert Schaedle, the executive committee of the Thoreau Society has voted to conduct a photography contest at the 1967 annual meeting in Concord. Any member of the society may enter and may submit up to three entries. All entries must be enlarged to the 8" x 10" size. Each photograph must have written on the back in pencil the name and address of the contestant. Each photograph must have attached to the front a label indicating its pertinence to Thoreau (i.e., a quotation from Thoreau which it illustrates or some site, artifact, etc., associated with the life of Thoreau) but not including the contestant's name. Photographs should be sent to Mr. Robert Needham, 11 Walden Terrace, Concord, Mass., to reach him before July 1, 1967, and with the outside envelope labeled "Thoreau Photography Contest." Contestants wishing to have their photographs returned should enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope of ap-

propriate size. The photographs will be displayed at the annual meeting and voted on by the members attending. The winners will be announced at the evening session and ribbons will be awarded. Early views (dated if possible) of the cairn at Walden, of the Thoreau houses in Concord, etc., will be considered of particular interest. All entries that have not been indicated to be returned will be added to the Thoreau Society Archives and it is hoped that the society may thus build up a good reference file of photographs. All entries should be in black and white. If there is sufficient interest, a color slide contest will be held another year.

#### A THOREAU POSTAGE STAMP. . . .

It has now been officially announced by the United States Post Office Department that a stamp commemorating the 150th anniversary of the birth of Thoreau will be issued in Concord, Mass., on July 12, 1967.

#### THE THOREAU FOUNDATION by Mary Sherwood . . .

A new organization dedicated to Thoreau has been organized in Concord. The Thoreau Foundation, Inc. came into existence late in May, 1966, and in June purchased a quaint old house next door to the Thoreau Texas house lot for its activities, which will be known as the Thoreau Lyceum. Featured in the Lyceum will be both evening and daytime lectures on the Concord authors, Concord history, and natural history, a book shop where natural history art will be sold, a small natural history museum, and a study center library with bibliography files, card files, and a repository for books and manuscripts on Concord author subjects, with emphasis on Thoreau.

Classes, lectures and projects will be scheduled seven days a week. A bird-feeder area will make behaviour and local population studies possible. A wildflower exhibit will be labeled with Thoreau quotations. In time, scholarships and grants will be made available for students of literature and natural history.

The Foundation hopes to purchase the Thoreau Texas House lot and eventually put up a reproduction of the Texas house and the pencil factory. This too must await acquisition of sufficient funds.

All Thoreauvians are invited to visit the Lyceum. Further information may be obtained from the curator, Mrs. Mary P. Sherwood, The Thoreau Lyceum, 48 Belknap St., Concord, Mass. 01742.

#### THE THOREAU FELLOWSHIP OF THE UNITED KINGDOM . .

At Camberley, Surrey, England, on October 10, 1966 the Thoreau Fellowship of the United Kingdom came into being. The "scattered forces of Thoreauvians in the Island of Britain have come together to share their common purpose and to bring to others Thoreau's philosophy." The opening meeting was fortunate in having Leonard Kleinfeld representing The Thoreau Society. Elected as officers were John F. Pontin of Buxton, Derbyshire, chairman; Eric David Williams, 24, Villiers Rd., Beckenham, Kent, secretary; and Arthur Stewart Lane, treasurer. The Fellowship will be glad to hear from any Thoreau enthusiasts from Great Britain or abroad. Address communications to the secretary at the above address.